

Health Alert

Public Health Emergency Update: Hepatitis A Outbreak among At-risk People in Philadelphia October 18, 2019

Since declaring a public health emergency in August, Philadelphia has continued to experience increased incidence of hepatitis A virus (HAV) infections among persons who use drugs and those who are living homeless. Many states are experiencing similar HAV outbreaks lasting several months due to local, person-to-person transmission among at-risk groups. Currently in Philadelphia, there are 355 locally-acquired HAV cases in 2019 - the majority (61%) of whom are adults who reported injection or non-injection drug use. Ninety (25%) persons were also experiencing homelessness. Thirty-five percent of cases have no reported risk factors. To date, two fatalities have occurred in persons with underlying chronic conditions and fulminant infection.

Hepatitis A vaccination continues to be the most important tool to prevent disease and stop this outbreak. Many adults in Philadelphia, especially those who use drugs or are experiencing homelessness, may not have a consistent medical provider. Thus, it is important to promote vaccine to anyone at high risk for HAV infection or serious complications at every opportunity and in any care location.

Vaccinate:

- People who use injection or non-injection drugs
- People experiencing homelessness or unstable housing
- People who are or were recently incarcerated
- Men who have sex with men (MSM)
- People with chronic liver disease (cirrhosis, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C)
- People with HIV (*New Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' Recommendation*)
- **Persons who work with or reside in communities with at-risk persons should also be vaccinated including healthcare workers, community service and food service providers**

If your facility does not have HAV vaccine on-hand, please encourage patients to visit a [pharmacy](#) if they have insurance. Patients can also be advised to visit PDPH-sponsored HAV vaccine clinics at McPherson Square Park on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10am to 2pm during the month of October. If additional assistance getting Hepatitis A vaccine is needed, contact PDPH at 215-685-6740.

- **Identify and report cases:** Promptly report acute HAV cases to PDPH by calling 215-685-6740 (after hours: call 215-686-4514).
- **Recommend HAV control and prevention measures for cases:**
 - Offer HAV vaccine to susceptible, close contacts of cases (e.g., household members, sex partners, persons who shared drugs with the case). Guidance for use of post-exposure vaccine is available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6743a5.htm>.
 - Advise HAV cases to take other steps to prevent transmission, such as hand washing, avoiding food preparation for others, condom use, and harm reduction practices while contagious (1 week after jaundice onset or if no jaundice, 2 weeks after illness onset).

For ongoing updates and resources please see: <https://hip.phila.gov/EmergentHealthTopics/HepA>

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Hepatitis A outbreak is continuing in Philadelphia with most cases reporting drug use and / or homelessness.
- Take every opportunity to vaccinate at-risk persons AND persons who work or reside in communities with at-risk persons.
- Promptly report acute cases to PDPH.

Increase in Confirmed Acute Hepatitis A Cases, Philadelphia, January 2017 – Sept 2019

